



## EUROPEAN BRIDGE LEAGUE

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#### Bridge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

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**T**he purpose of this paper is to observe the path of bridge from its birth until present day, and evaluate the challenges that our sport faces in today's world. Is the situation satisfactory? Can we be optimistic about the future of bridge? Or is bridge nearing the end of its life circle? What efforts have been made so far for its development? Have they been successful? What else could be done in this direction? In short, **is bridge doing well?** And if bridge is going to continue, what is the path it should be following in the future?

We should start from the very beginning. Because *past experience guides future planning*.

#### 1. THE PAST

We do not know exactly when and where bridge came into being. But it is generally accepted that bridge originated from **whist** (meaning *quiet, silent*) which appeared in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century in England. Whist was occasionally referred to as *French ruff*, possibly revealing that it was played in France too; others claim that whist was a transformation of *trionph*<sup>1</sup> a game popular in 16<sup>th</sup>-century France. **Edmond Hoyle** (1672-1749), a writer best known for his works on the rules and play of card games, wrote an early popular and definite textbook, *A Short Treatise on the Game of Whist* (1743), and there is abundant evidence that, in the middle of the 18th century, whist was regularly played in the coffee houses of London and by the fashionable society. By the late 19th century an elaborate and rigid set of rules detailing the laws of whist, its etiquette and play techniques had been developed that took a large amount of study to master.

Whist is a trick game played by four players who form two partnerships, and with a full deck of cards. Very much like bridge, the objective is to win as many tricks as possible. However, there is no bidding, and the trump suit is determined by the dealer's last card which is turned face up.

A certain kind of bidding appears in the game of **vint**, which developed in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Russia. Vint (which means *screw* in Russian) is named so because the four players, each in turn, propose, bid and overbid each other until one, having bid higher than the others care to follow, names the trump suit; and his vis-a-vis plays as his partner. In vint there is no dummy, all taken tricks count toward a game (that is, the tricks taken by the

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<sup>1</sup> *Trumps* may have been named after this game.

defenders as well as the tricks taken by declarer's side including overtricks, regardless of whether the contract was made or not), and the bidding ends after eight consecutive passes (everyone passes twice including the player who made the last bid). The value of a trick depends on the level of the contract. In higher contracts the value of a trick is higher, but this was later simplified so that the level of the contract was the only thing the value of the trick depended on.

There are references to vint in classical Russian literature, notably in the short stories of Anton Chekhov, and in *Cancer Ward* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

Vint was quite similar to *Russian whist* or *Biritch* (=no trump), from which the term *Bridge* may have emerged. In biritch, the partner of the dealer (the dealer is always the declarer) exposes all his cards on the table and becomes *dummy*; his cards are then played by the dealer.

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, vint spread to Finland, where it evolved into **skruuvi**; skruuvi features also a kitty<sup>2</sup> and *misère*<sup>3</sup> contracts.

In the west, biritch was known as **bridge** (today referred to as *straight bridge* or *bridge whist* to distinguish from the contemporary game). Some sources claim the origin of bridge to be in Constantinople in the 1870's where biritch was played by the Russian community. The game either made its way to England via a Greek colony at Manchester; or was learned in the trenches at Plevna during the Russo-Turkish war of 1878. No matter what, whether Indian, Russian, Greek or Turkish, upon its introduction to New York in 1893 and to London in 1894, bridge almost immediately supplanted whist in the card rooms of men's clubs, and before 1900 it was the favourite diversion in fashionable mixed gatherings.

In 'bridge whist', after the cards were dealt, the dealer could make the declaration (name any suit as trump, or decide to play without trump), or he could transfer this duty to his partner. Before leading, the player on the dealer's left (eldest hand) could double or could pass that privilege to his partner; and if either doubled, dealer or his partner could redouble, and so the redoubling might continue indefinitely (except that many clubs placed a limit upon the number of redoubles).

The next step in the evolution of our game was **auction bridge** which seems to have been first played in 1904. However, a book published in India, in 1889, puts forward auction bridge as an invention of three members of the Indian Civil Service stationed at an isolated community; they designed a three-handed form of bridge to compensate the lack of a fourth player. Their key contribution was the concept of competitive bidding for the declaration.

The essential features added by 'auction bridge' were that all four players bid for the right to name the trump suit and that the highest bidder or his partner (not necessarily the dealer) became declarer and played dummy's hand. In 'auction bridge', game (& slam) bonuses are given to declarer even if not bid. Thus a 2♠ bid making 11 tricks gets the game bonus. This leads to many low level auctions that are easily made. Vulnerability is not a factor.

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<sup>2</sup> The highest bidder took a kitty of four cards to his hand and gave one card for every other player before card play started. This enabled the declarer side to arrange very shaped hands, which lead to higher contracts.

<sup>3</sup> the player who bids *misère* undertakes to win no tricks or as few as possible, usually at no trump.

Similar was the French version of 'auction bridge', called **plafond**. In **plafond**, only the number of tricks that the final bidder announced he would get, count towards game.

The English Channel kept 'auction bridge' and 'plafond' quite apart, but finally the two games were joined in what we know as bridge today – **contract bridge** - in a rather unexpected manner. American millionaire, Harold S. Vanderbilt (1884-1970), a world traveller and Francophile, who had tasted the joys of **plafond** at the *Travellers Club* in Paris, was on a cruise aboard SS Finland, en route from San Francisco to Havana, Cuba. Not having much to do, Vanderbilt devised a set of new rules and tried the new game with three friends - Dudley L. Pickman, a Boston lawyer; Francis M. Bacon, a New York broker; and Frederick S. Allen, a longtime resident of Paris - who were travelling with him.



The most significant change introduced by Vanderbilt was that only the tricks contracted for were scored below the line toward game or a slam bonus, a change that resulted in bidding becoming much more challenging and interesting. Also new was the concept of vulnerability, making sacrifices to protect the lead in a rubber more expensive, and the various scores were adjusted to produce a more balanced game.

Following the cruise, Vanderbilt and his three friends casually introduced their intellectual treat to acquaintances but otherwise did little to promote it. However, the game seemed to catch on by itself. Within months it had monopolized card tables across the United States, and by 1927 the *New York Whist Club's* Card Committee, of which Vanderbilt was a member, published the first official Laws of contract bridge and incorporated Vanderbilt's scoring schedule into them. Vanderbilt remained more or less in the background, in fact so much so that many bridge players associate contract bridge with the professional promoters who stepped in and made their fortunes and their reputations with publicity campaigns. Such men as Ely Culbertson, for example.

'Auction bridge' and 'plafond' lasted for a few more years, but by the early 1930's, contract bridge (or just *bridge*), Harold S. Vanderbilt's 'new game', had become the *ne plus ultra* of all card games.

## 2. **WHY BRIDGE?**

Bridge is certainly not the only game, or even the only card game, invented throughout history. What has human mind created in the field of games through time and location is clearly countless. Many of these games have disappeared; other still enjoy varied degrees of popularity but only locally, in certain parts of the world. It is remarkable that bridge has followed a different course: it developed and expanded over several centuries and it is now played in an organized manner in about two-thirds of the world's countries, and certainly in many more on a social basis.

Of course, bridge is not the *only* game that has met such sustained popularity around the world, but it is one of the very few. So, it is reasonable to wonder what are the qualities which are responsible for this rare success.

To start with, bridge is a game of skill, not a game of luck. This is important, because, in the long run, nobody is happy to win or lose without evident reason. To win overall because one is objectively superior, is accepted by all concerned; and shows the way to those who are still inferior. In short, it makes sense.

Another contributing quality of bridge is that the number of possible deals is so large<sup>4</sup> that it is extremely improbable for any player to meet the same deal twice in one (or more...) lifetime. Therefore, bridge is an **inexhaustible** game. Although there are similar hands, nobody has ever reported that a deal he had played before revealed details of a present deal. So, there is hardly any risk of getting bored at bridge.

Bridge is not an individual game, but requires the cooperation of two players. This leads to the necessity of good communication between them, as the first step. Then, a social atmosphere is likely to develop between the two players who share and try for the same goal. Eventually, the game finishes, but social ties remain! **Sociality** is a great quality of bridge.

### 3. **BRIDGE AND CHESS**

Chess is a very old game, dating as far back as the 6<sup>th</sup> century when it originated in India. From India, it spread to Persia; and, when Persia was conquered by the Arabs, it was taken up by the Muslim world and subsequently spread to Southern Europe. Chess reached the western world in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and organized chess play begun in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today, chess is very well developed almost everywhere in the world, with national chess federations existing in 174 countries.

Like bridge, chess is a complex game of skill, and it is clearly also an inexhaustible game<sup>5</sup>. There are no figures available as to how many people play chess worldwide, but it must be a huge number, given how easy it is to learn basic chess. This is certainly not the case with bridge where a course is required to create even a very weak player.

Chess depicts the confrontation of two armies, yet it has never been considered a military game unsuitable for children. Bridge uses playing cards only as a tool, but carries the stigma of gambling in many communities.

However, if we look deeper, a fundamental difference becomes evident. Chess is a mathematical game in the full sense of the term. There are no secrets and uncertainties; all information required is in plain sight, and chess belongs to the category of *deterministic*<sup>6</sup> games. Deterministic games are easy to program; computers are good at manipulating and storing data and therefore can play good chess provided they have adequate capacity and speed to handle the enormous amount of data involved.

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<sup>4</sup> It has been calculated to be 53 octillion, a 29-digit number! Richard Pavlicek has estimated that if a million computers were used, and each computer tested a million deals per second (an amazing performance) it would take well over a *billion* years to test every bridge deal - 1,701,063,475 years, to be exact.

<sup>5</sup> It is still impossible even for today's super computers to calculate all possible permutations at chess, but Hardy (1999) estimated the number of possible games to be of the order of  $10^{500}$ !

<sup>6</sup> A **deterministic** system in mathematics is a system in which no randomness is involved in the development of future states of the system. A deterministic model will thus always produce the same output from a given starting condition or initial state.

Some consider mathematics as a measure of the human knowledge for which we should be proud. As a matter of fact, it is also a measure of how little we know about the world around us! Mathematics function under very exact and quite unrealistic conditions. They deal with lines, circles, plates, spheres, etc. – when none of these exists in nature. They deal with a virtual – rather than the actual – world. No, it is not a mistake! It is simply as much as have come forward so far. The hope is that one day we will be able to advance much further and have mathematics covering the real world.

Being a mathematical game, chess is part of a virtual world. This is the reason why it is so predictable. In chess, a grand master does not lose from a weak player through no fault of his own.

In bridge, things are quite different. In bridge there is a lot of mathematics too, but in the sense of probability and statistics. As a rule, we do not know for sure the outcome of a certain move we are considering<sup>7</sup>; this time we will win the trick, but next time, in a similar situation, we may lose it. We usually follow the probabilities, hoping for the best, and we win more



*Computers may be able to play good chess – a distinctly inferior game – but when there will be a computer able to compose a 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony or paint a Mona Liza, then - and only then - shall I accept that computers can play good bridge.*

*Victor Mollo*

times than we lose, in the long run. However, to play in the most probable way is only a suggestion, from which we may choose to deviate at will. In bridge, Goliath usually prevails, but sometimes David is the winner. As in real life!

Another important consideration is that bridge is a partnership game, i.e. it requires the cooperation of two people to succeed. This is sought mainly through communication; the way people communicate between them is not covered by mathematics.

The fact that bridge is only partially a mathematical game accounts for the inability of computers to play really good bridge. Sure enough, computers are able to know the rules very well and do not miss the exact probability figures in any card combination. But they are helpless in the non-mathematical part of the game.

Maybe, nothing describes the situation better than the legendary bridge writer **Victor Mollo** who once said in his typical mordant style: *'Computers may be able to play good chess – a distinctly inferior game – but when there will be a computer able to compose a 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony or paint a Mona Liza, then - and only then - shall I accept that computers can play good bridge.'*

<sup>7</sup> **Non-deterministic** system: a system in which the output cannot be predicted because there are multiple possible outcomes for each input. The system exhibits different behaviors on different runs.

#### 4. **BRIDGE IN THE 20th CENTURY**

Contract bridge may have been invented in international waters, but it first flourished in the United States. The person who carried the flag was not inventor Harold S. Vanderbilt, as one might have thought, but an auction bridge expert, **Ely Culbertson** of New York.

Culbertson (1891-1955), an entrepreneurial personality, established contract bridge as the leading card game, and himself as its principal authority, by a succession of tournament victories and by various maneuvers devised to publicize contract bridge and Culbertson personally. When the new game of contract bridge began to replace auction bridge, Culbertson saw his opportunity to overtake the leaders of auction bridge. He planned a far-reaching and successful campaign to promote himself as the leader of the new game. As player, organizer, bidding theorist, magazine editor, and team leader, he was a key figure in the growth of contract bridge in its great boom years of the 1930s. He was a great showman who became rich, was highly extravagant, and lost and gained fortunes several times over.



In 1930 Culbertson's teams won nearly every one of the principal American tournaments, then went to England and defeated three leading British teams. In the winter of 1931–32 Culbertson and his wife, Josephine Culbertson, a great player in her own right, played and defeated in a 150-rubber match one of the most prominent players among the former auction bridge authorities, Sidney S. Lenz. The progress of the match, called by American newspapers 'the bridge battle of the century', was featured for more than a month on their front pages! The unprecedented publicity made contract bridge a fad in the United States. The *American Contract Bridge League* (ACBL) was established in 1937, joining the *American (Auction) Bridge League* and the *United States Bridge Association*.



The trend continued in the United States through the war years to the 1950s. *Sports Illustrated* magazine included regular bridge columns and articles, and *Time* magazine featured expert Charles H. Goren, 'Mr Bridge', on an issue cover<sup>8</sup>. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the commanding general of the victorious allied forces in Europe during World War II, and 34<sup>th</sup> President of the United States (1953-61), was a keen bridge player – and made no secret of it<sup>9</sup>. As an American player put it: *'Ike played bridge, and so did we all'*.



<sup>8</sup> On 29 September 1958.

<sup>9</sup> The following story is well known. In November 1942, the invasion of North Africa was all in readiness but some 800 allied ships were fogbound off the African coast. 'What 'll we do now?' the other ranking officers asked. 'Let's have a game of bridge', Eisenhower replied. So they did. Eisenhower, General Alfred Gruenther, General Mark Clark and Commander Harry Butcher, Ike's naval aide, played bridge until the fog lifted and the invasion could begin. (General

Bridge also developed in Europe before World War II. Here, rubber bridge was more popular than duplicate, and was regularly played in the cafes in Vienna and Budapest, besides, of course, many London clubs. In France, auction bridge expert Pierre Albarran became the pioneer of the new game. In the Netherlands, bridge was popular too and M. Anthonie Lucardie was the prime mover in the launching of the European Team Championship, held in 1932 in The Hague and won by Austria. The first World Championship was arranged in 1937 in Budapest, and again Austria was the winner.

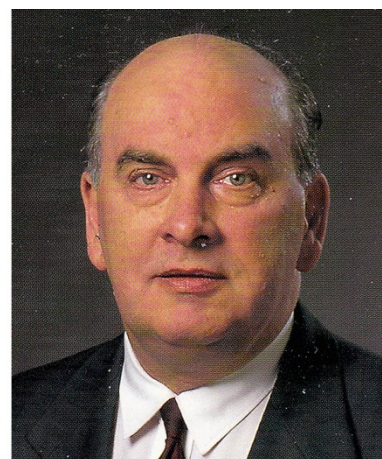
After the end of the war, the *European Bridge League* (EBL) was founded in 1947, and the European Team Championships were re-established a year later in Copenhagen. In 1950, a three-cornered competition between teams representing USA, Great Britain and Sweden-Iceland was held on the island of Bermuda and the Governor of Bermuda offered a precious trophy which has since become the symbol of world bridge supremacy. The *World Bridge Federation* (WBF) was founded in 1958 in Oslo, by representatives of Europe, North America and South America who were assigned to WBF zones 1-3. The rest of the world was added gradually, resulting in the WBF now having 8 zones covering the entire globe.



Jaime Ortiz-Patiño



José Damiani



André Boekhorst

The last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be described as the golden era of bridge. Pioneered by **Jaime Ortiz-Patiño**<sup>10</sup>, the game was well regulated with special emphasis on the ethical side. Championships came to be professionally organized. **José Damiani**<sup>11</sup> led a very successful effort in the field of public relations both with public authorities and the commercial world, and sponsorship agreements were made. **André Boekhorst**<sup>12</sup> introduced programmes for the development of the game, especially among the young people. Bridge teaching was reformed as to make learning simple, and attention was paid to the proper education of the bridge

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Alfred M. Gruenther later served as NATO Supreme Commander and was elected Honorary President of the *World Bridge Federation*.)

<sup>10</sup> World Bridge Federation President (1976-86); thereafter WBF President Emeritus.

<sup>11</sup> European Bridge League President (1987-95); thereafter EBL President Emeritus. World Bridge Federation President (1994-2010); thereafter WBF Chairman Emeritus.

<sup>12</sup> EBL Executive Committee Member and Vice President (1973-95); elected EBL President, he passed away three days later before assuming office.

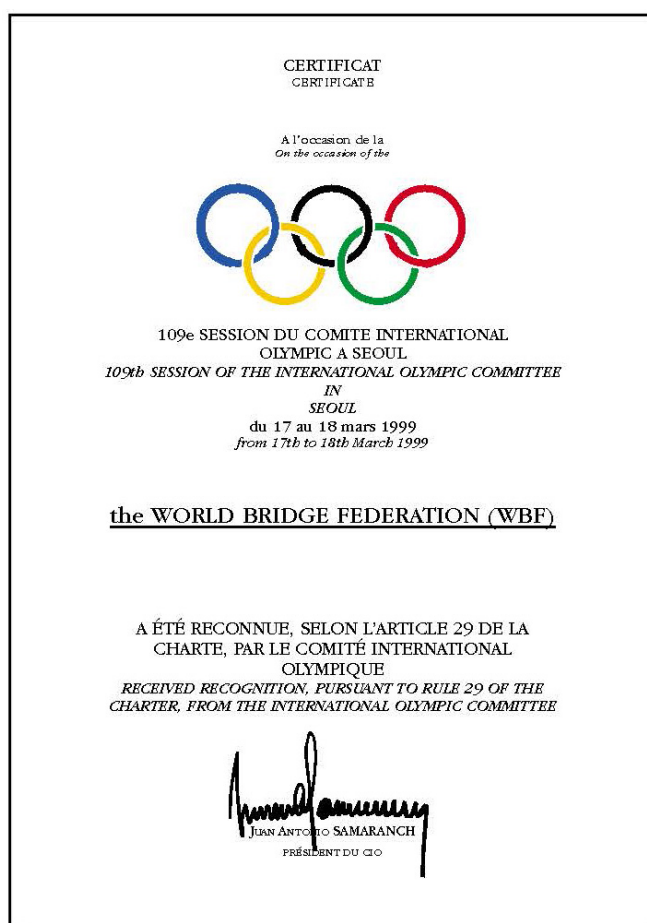
teacher. Bridge was introduced in schools, with special teaching methods for the pre-teens. The abundant use of emerging modern technology made bridge flourish as never before.

## 5. FROM GAME TO SPORT

Bridge underwent an important transformation towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when it was decided to turn it from a (card) *game* into a (mind) *sport*. It was a conscious decision which was not taken light-hearted.

As a *game*, bridge belonged nowhere because, unlike in sports, there are no big international game organizations where bridge could find an umbrella of protection and support. Being non-telegenic, bridge could not hope in being visually exposed to masses and enjoy the benefits of popularity and advertising that television brings. And as a *card game*, bridge did not have much of a future within the educational system where young people – the future!.. – are concentrated. So, even if some of the old discrediting features of bridge – connection with gambling through playing cards, a game of the aristocracy, etc. – may have been effectively discharged, the future of bridge as a game did not look promising.

Migrating to the world of sports seemed to have considerable advantages. Belonging to the sports family, bridge would enjoy a precious public image which offers a great advantage for its development in any age group, not just the youth. Then, there is a lot of money in the world of sports and if bridge could be a part of it, it would no longer have to rely on the individual members for its development needs.



The effort to make bridge part of the Olympic movement started while Jaime Ortiz-Patiño was in office, with WBF Executive member Mazhar Jafri of Pakistan playing an important liaison role. José Damiani took the baton and pushed the matter forward, determined to succeed. It was not at all easy, but in June 1995, the *International Olympic Committee* (IOC) admitted the *World Bridge Federation* (WBF) as 'part of the Olympic Movement', awarding it the status of a 'Recognized Sport Organization'. Four years later, the status of the WBF was elevated to that of an 'International Federation' (IF). This is just one step short of being included in the programme of the Olympic Games and receiving Olympic Medals.

There are some 100 sports practiced internationally. About one third of them are *official sports*; they are included in the Olympic Games and are awarded



Olympic Medals. Another one third are *recognized sports* (by the IOC). At present, bridge belongs to this category<sup>13</sup>. However, it is very important to climb to the top category, because not only bridge would then benefit from the image of an Olympic sport, but also because National Olympic Committees (NOCs) all over the world would be required to accept the corresponding National Bridge Federation as their member and, by virtue of the Olympic Charter, *share the available funds* as it happens with all Olympic medal sports.

Given the gigantism of the Summer Olympic Games and the high cost of their organization, the present IOC policy is very much against increasing the size of these Games; on the contrary, there are sports which have been removed from the list of the Summer Olympic Games, in order to reduce the overall size of the Games.



Marc Hodler

For this reason, **Marc Hodler**<sup>14</sup>, a former bridge official and IOC vice president in mid 1990s, suggested that bridge (and chess) seek to compete within the framework of the Winter Olympic Games. Like most winter sports, bridge and chess are sports apt for competition rather than spectators. Rather than requiring additional infrastructure, they are played in existing hotel rooms and convention facilities which are often unoccupied during the Winter Games, and they could be filling the usually vacant afternoon period between the snow sports (held in the morning) and ice sports (held in the evening).

Unfortunately, the excellent idea of Marc Hodler did not bear fruit, largely because of the reaction of the other sports involved. Fearing that they may be opening the door of gigantism to these Games too, they insisted on the letter of the Olympic Charter which states that the Winter Games are only for sports 'practiced on snow or ice'.

Seeing this, José Damiani pursued another idea, namely to create a third category of Olympic Games featuring mind sports. Accordingly, the *International Mind Sports Association* (IMSA) was established in 2005, of which Bridge, Chess, Draughts and Go were the founding members.

The first **World Mind Sports Games** were held in Beijing, China, in 2008, just two months after the Summer Olympic Games organized there. The figures were astonishing: the Games attracted the attention of 326 reporters from 109 foreign and domestic media agencies that covered the event; more than 2,000 news stories were published. The official website received more than 600,000 hits daily. All the domestic commercial websites published special

<sup>13</sup> Other IOC *recognized sports* are baseball, billiards, bowling, chess, cricket, karate, motorcycling, polo, softball, squash, surfing, water ski, etc.

<sup>14</sup> Marc Hodler (1918-2006) of Switzerland was a member of the IOC from 1963 until his death, and made history when, in 1998, he uncovered widespread corruption in the bidding process for the 2002 Winter Games and several previous Olympic bids. The ensuing scandal led to an overhaul of the committee and the departure of 10 delegates. An avid skier, Hodler was President of the *International Ski Federation* for 47 years (1951-98). He was also a keen bridge player; he served as President of the *Swiss Bridge Federation* for 36 years (1952-88) and was elected President of the WBF Congress in 2001.

pages heralding the Games. Hundreds of millions of 'netizens' and TV viewers were glued to a steady flow of live telecasts from Beijing!

It is intended that the World Mind Sports Games be held on every leap year following the Summer Olympics, and in the same place, if possible. Should this effort be successful, it is hoped that the IOC might place the World Mind Sports Games under its auspices and award Olympic medals to the winners, as it happens in the Summer and Winter Olympics.

The WBF is one of the 32 International Sports Federations, members of the *Association of IOC Recognized International Sports Federations* (ARISF) – an organization which represents recognized sports collectively as one of the pillars to the Olympic Movement. The WBF is also part of *SportAccord* (former *General Association of International Sports Federations* – GAISF). Founded in 1967, SportAccord is the umbrella organization for all (Olympic and non-Olympic) International Sports Federations. SportAccord also organizes multi-sports games and sport-related international associations. Currently, SportAccord counts 105 members [90 full members (International Sports Federations governing specific sports) and 15 associate members (organizations which conduct activities closely related to International Sports Federations)]. Chess is also a member of both ARISF and SportAccord, but Draughts and Go belong only to SportAccord, as they are yet to be recognized by the IOC.

How likely is it that the IOC will eventually adopt the World Mind Sports Games as an integral part of Olympism? Nobody can say with certainty at this time, but nothing fundamentally negative has been raised so far. It could well be just a matter of time, until the Olympic family realizes – more than they do today – that a sport does not have to be physical, and accepts mind sports too. Probably, a positive indication is that SportAccord took the initiative to organize Mind Sports Games for the first time. The inaugural event, took place in December 2011 in Beijing, and it was such a great success that SportAccord have announced their thoughts to establish it as an annual event!

Every coin has two sides, so the transformation of bridge into a sport had also a number of side effects, as well as some negative repercussions. Smoking and drinking during tournament play were banned. Matches now finish at reasonable times, instead of extending well into the early hours (as it used to happen due also to the lack of regulations on time limits). A dress code has been introduced. However, bridge has also been forced to observe anti-doping regulations, despite the fact that doping is hardly beneficial in mind sports. A number of organizational requirements may be leading bridge to arrangements which are not financially viable. Perhaps, the most important repercussion is that bridge may no longer enjoy traditional sponsors for whom a card game was considered advantageous (tobacco, liquor, etc.); this loss could be compensated only occasionally in recent years.

## 6. CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT

Speaking about development, our primary consideration here is the number of bridge players. Development has, of course, a much wider meaning. There is technical development, image enhancement, improvement of finances, development in bridge theory, advancement of regulations, etc. However, it seems that, in bridge, increasing the number of members is a *panacea*, a substance to cure all diseases! More members mean more resources, a wider and

better known public image, and, inevitably, more bridge people available to advance theory and technique.

- **The West**

Bridge became a very popular game almost immediately after its inception by Harold S. Vanderbilt in the mid 1920s, and within very few years it had wiped 'auction bridge' off the map. It boosted in the United States, mostly in the 1930s and 1940s, but also in the 1950s and 1960s, reaching maximum membership around 1970 when it numbered some 200,000 players.

Although bridge came to Europe (via Great Britain) almost immediately, it did not flourish as much as in North America, and was rather confined to aristocracy in most countries. The situation begun to improve after the end of the war, and by 1970, Europe had more or less the same number of members as the United States.

Bridge made little progress in South America, where it has always had a limited following. Yet, South America was a founding member of the *World Bridge Federation* (WBF) which was established in 1958.

Bridge in North America and Europe followed opposite courses in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at least as far as membership is concerned. In North America, the ACBL put emphasis on serving the existing players rather than attracting new ones, especially young people. The result was that the average age of members came close to 70 years at the turn of the century. Inevitably, membership declined, and despite the efforts (mostly among senior players) of Jay Baum, CEO of the ACBL over the past decade, today it stands at around 160,000 players together with Canada.

In Europe, the same period was most dynamic. Organized developing efforts, pioneered by José Damiani in France and André Boekhorst in The Netherlands raised membership in these two countries to 100,000 players each; together with progress in the Nordic countries, England and Italy, total EBL membership rose to just short of 400,000. However, it has since remained stagnant!

- **The East**



Deng Xiaoping

A most precious seed for the future of bridge was planted in the 1920s when an unknown Chinese boy studied and worked in France. While there, he was influenced by Marxism – but he also learned and quickly appreciated bridge. Upon his return to China, **Deng Xiaoping** joined the Chinese Communist Party and rose to power under Chairman Mao Zedong. Largely thanks to Deng, bridge had a much better treatment in China, than in the Soviet Union and most of its satellite countries where bridge was a forbidden bourgeois game, while chess was flourishing instead.

When *The Great Leap Forward*<sup>15</sup> ended in catastrophe, Deng proposed major reforms, such as free markets for farmers and incentive bonuses. He was then denounced as a ‘capitalist roader’ and was purged. One of the charges he faced was that he preferred to waste his time playing bridge, rather than taking care of the needs of the people. Deng survived the *Cultural Revolution*<sup>16</sup> and regained prominence after Mao’s death in 1976 when, although already in his 70s, he set out to modernize China. His policy is well expressed by his famous saying ‘*it doesn't matter whether a cat is white or black; as long as it catches mice it is a good cat*’. In other words, he did not worry too much whether a policy was capitalist or socialist as long as it improved the economy and the lives of the people. China’s phenomenal economic growth largely owes its success to this pragmatism of Deng Xiaoping’s theory.

*“When people see me swimming they think I am physically fit and when they hear of me playing bridge they think I am mentally fit”.*

Deng Xiaoping

saying ‘*it doesn't matter whether a policy was long as it improved the of the people. China's growth largely owes its pragmatism of Deng*

Throughout his remarkable life, Deng remained a keen bridge player. It took a very short time after he was recognized as China’s *paramount leader*<sup>17</sup> for the *Chinese Contract Bridge Association* (CCBA) to be established (1980) under the Ministry of Sports; Deng became CCBA Honorary President. Months later, Jaime Ortiz-Patiño led a WBF delegation and visited Beijing to discuss CCBA’s membership to the WBF. He was pleasantly surprised to receive an invitation and partner the paramount leader in a game of bridge which lasted well into the night! In 1981, Deng Xiaoping was named *Personality of the Year* by the *International Bridge Press Association* (IBPA); CCBA was admitted to the WBF in 1982.

Stating the case of bridge, Deng Xiaoping once said: ‘*When people see me swimming they think I am physically fit and when they hear of me playing bridge they think I am mentally fit.*’ Deng’s influence on the popularization of bridge in China is unquestionable. However, he was not alone in this. Many top Chinese politicians were avid bridge players. Vice Prime Minister **Li Lanqing** stated that ‘*Bridge is, with music, the only universal language*’. In 1993, Vice Chairman of the National People’s Congress **Li Tieying** told WBF President Bobby Wolff: ‘*There are no less than 400 million card players in China and I wish to con-*

<sup>15</sup> An economic and social campaign of the Chinese Communist Party in the early 1960s, aimed to use China's vast population to rapidly transform the country from an agrarian economy into a modern communist society through the process of rapid industrialization and collectivization.

<sup>16</sup> The Cultural Revolution was a political movement launched in May 1966. Chairman Mao alleged that bourgeois elements were entering the government and society at large, aiming to restore capitalism. He insisted that these ‘revisionists’ be removed through violent class struggle. China's youth responded to Mao's appeal by forming Red Guard groups around the country. The movement spread into the military, urban workers, and the Communist Party leadership itself. It resulted in widespread factional struggles in all walks of life. In the top leadership, it led to a mass purge of senior officials who were accused of deviating from the socialist path. During the same period Mao's personality cult grew to immense proportions. Millions of people were persecuted in the violent factional struggles that ensued across the country, and suffered a wide range of abuses including torture, rape, imprisonment, sustained harassment, and seizure of property. A large segment of the population was forcibly displaced, most notably the transfer of urban youth to rural regions during the ‘Down to the Countryside Movement’. Historical relics and artifacts were destroyed. Cultural and religious sites were ransacked.

<sup>17</sup> Remarkably, Deng preferred to run his vast country from backstage as he did not hold any significant public post in this period. However, he was referred to as the ‘paramount leader’ – which is exactly what he was!

vert 30% of them (i.e. 120 million) to become bridge players'! WBF Vice President Patrick Choy<sup>18</sup> reports that, today in China, bridge is taught in high schools, universities and community centers. Even though the current bridge population is still short of Mr Li's target, the latest estimate (2008) of 24 million players in China is an impressive figure!

In December 2011, a WBF delegation visited an elite school in Beijing, the *High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China (RDFZ)*. This is a most exclusive educational



institution for boys and girls 13-18 years old, hosting some 4,000 pupils. Besides providing high-level education, RDFZ encourages pupils to widen their horizons by taking up extracurricular activities, ranging from sports to arts and hobbies. Of the many possibilities open to them, it is remarkable that bridge is the free choice of some 850 pupils!

Besides China where bridge is classified as a major sport, like table tennis, **Indonesia** is another Asian country where bridge flourishes. Bridge has been popular in Indonesia since the days this country was a colony of The Netherlands and was played by many Dutch residents who formed the upper echelon of the local society<sup>19</sup>. Unlike many other NBOs where the effort is placed on serving the few existing players, the Indonesian Bridge Federation has been successful at the grass root level by teaching the game and organizing competitions in schools, colleges and above all, community centers. State leaders, ministerial-rank officials and top executives of major corporations are keen players and act as ambassadors of bridge.

Indonesia is proud of their youth bridge development. They have a program called *Bridge Masuk Sekolah* (Bridge Got to School) which has produced many new Junior players. In Manadu, a city in North Celebes, one of Indonesia's 33 provinces about a 2-hour flight from Jakarta, there are still many people who can speak Dutch. They sought some help from the Dutch Bridge Federation and in 2004 they started a *minibrIDGE* program for young people. The material was translated and teachers were recruited to use it. The program bears fruit and today there are many people willing to carry it out. The result is that Indonesia has now some 30,000 *active* Juniors, spread around the country. Each year, the Indonesian Federation organizes a special student championship. The qualifiers are played locally, but for the finals, some 500 Juniors are brought together. The Education Department of the government supports the school program. *Unima*, one university in Manadu, actually has bridge on the curriculum as a mandatory course for the students in one of the terms!

<sup>18</sup> A member of the WBF Executive Council since 1991 and delegate of zone 6 (Pacific Asia) to the WBF.

<sup>19</sup> André Boekhorst who later served on the Dutch Bridge Federation (NBB) board for 28 years during which NBB membership climbed to 100,000 members had been born in Indonesia and was first acquainted with bridge there.

Bridge is aided by government funding at high school and university levels in Hong Kong and Singapore, two city states with a small number of registered players. Bridge is taught to students who in turn organize bridge clubs and run well-attended inter-school competitions.

In contrast, bridge is still under-developed in a number of populous Asian countries, namely India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, The Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar and Vietnam. With a total population of about 2 billion, i.e. about 30% of the world's population, these countries represent a tremendous potential source of future bridge players.

- **The rest of the world**

Membership figures in the rest of the world are quite disappointing with the exception of the South Pacific zone (Australia and New Zealand) which totals some 50,000 members. Australia and New Zealand are very much organized like European NBOs. Taking into account their (small) population, their membership per capita is the highest in the world (about 1%, i.e. double that of Europe and North America).

Although South America has a population of some 400 million, the registered bridge players in the ten member countries total less than 5,000! This is less than the players of Israel alone! Central America is even smaller with just 1,500 players in the 20 member countries, i.e. smaller than Ireland or Wales.

With about 7,000 members (i.e. like Scotland, but mostly concentrated in South Africa and Egypt), out of a population estimated to be around 1 billion, Africa has great potential for bridge development<sup>20</sup>. Whether the African zone is ready to start developing now is another question which can hardly be answered in the affirmative at present.

- **Overall**

All in all, the membership of the World Bridge Federation now stands slightly below the 700,000<sup>21</sup> mark. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

- If not slightly decreasing, the number of bridge players has stopped increasing in Europe and North America where it did increase considerably in the latter half of the 20th century. It is probably more alarming that the average age has gone up substantially, approaching 60 years in Europe and 70 in North America.
- Bridge continues to be grossly under-developed in the rest of the Americas and Africa.
- There are no substantial changes in South Pacific. Membership remains at the same levels, but the average age does not seem to increase as in Europe and North America, probably owing to the 'fresh blood' still pouring there from troubled economies.

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<sup>20</sup> It is in Africa where chess heavily outnumbers bridge in terms of the number of member countries.

<sup>21</sup> This refers to registered members only. The number of bridge players worldwide is not known. Some sources speak of 50 million, but London's *The Independent* mentioned that the world's bridge population is some 200 million (2006).

- Bridge is making spectacular progress in Asia. China and Indonesia are the clear leaders in this, while a populous world, from Pakistan to The Philippines, represents a great potential for bridge development in the immediate future. It is typical that the new players added to Asian bridge each year substantially decrease the average age of the membership.

## 7. THE ERA OF THE COMPUTERS

Personal computers entered our lives in the early 1980s, and there is no question that their advent influenced bridge more than a little. Internet, increasingly available as from the mid 1990s, concluded (?) the revolution.

- **Computers vs Television for Bridge**

Most physical sports are quite spectacular and therefore offer pictorial material suitable for TV broadcast. This is, of course, the main advantage of the physical sports which are thus widely advertised to the public. In addition, instead of paying for this highly beneficial exposure, they get paid instead through TV broadcasting rights! In fact, TV rights are the main source of income of most physical sports. Sponsorship is another substantial source, of course; it would be there anyway, but it would not have been so substantial without TV broadcasting.

In passing, we should not neglect the fact that physical sports mostly use vision to disseminate information about them. Whatever happens is more a question of *how* it happened rather than *what* happened, so *vision*, irrespective of form, is imperative for these sports. It can be sketches, photographs, film or video, etc. – the more depicting, the better. The alternative of passing information through speech, written or oral, is not satisfactory. Without vision, physical sports would not have been anywhere near where they are today in terms of popularity. Like it happened with music; before the era of sound recording, music was the privilege of the wealthy who could afford orchestras in their castles.

Bridge – as well as other mind sports for that matter – is not spectacular. Being unsuitable for television, it is not traditionally broadcast and therefore does not enjoy the great advantages of the physical sports. The negative repercussions of this on public exposure and finances are enormous, but we have to live with our nature.

Information at bridge is not visual, as in physical sports. The question here is *what* happened; *how* it happened is hardly interesting. Therefore, information at bridge needs to be transferred by other means. The written or oral speech is certainly suitable; reading in a newspaper or book how a bridge hand was played one has the feeling of completeness which is certainly missing when he reads how a goalkeeper handled a penalty. In modern terms, we can say that bridge is a game of data; data is handled very well by computers and communicated easily through Internet. Thus, although, as we saw earlier, bridge is not a suitable game to be played by computers, bridge administration, in the general sense, certainly benefits from computers.

- **Technological Advances**

The advent of computers brought about a revolution to our lives, as so many things, previously impossible or very difficult to accomplish, could now be done with minimum effort. Bridge was no exception.

The most noticeable application where bridge benefitted from modern technology is probably tournament scoring. Whether at club level or in a major championship, results are now available, practically as play ends. Then, there is tournament organization and administration which have been greatly enhanced. From board duplication and vugraph presentation to simple announcements, finances and documents – everything today is handled with the aid of computers. And the job is done quickly and accurately.

- **Online Play**

Maybe, the most sensational application of computers and Internet made for bridge was the introduction of online bridge play. From the time of Matthew Clegg who introduced bridge on Internet with *OKBridge* to Fred Gitelman's BBO (*Bridge Base Online*), our sport has benefitted tremendously as people were given the opportunity not just to play bridge, but to play with and against each other without moving away from the comfort of their armchair. In addition, they are able to watch bridge being played by others, often accompanied by expert commentary as in the case of important matches. Bridge partners who are far away from each other can practice thanks to online bridge. Handicapped people are presented with 'unheard of' possibilities. And even sociality between bridge players is served with the opportunity they have to chat with each other over Internet.

Originally, there had been a widespread worry that online bridge might antagonize live bridge. What would happen to our sport if today's entire structure (clubs, NBOs, etc.) collapsed in case players did not move from their homes? An ad hoc Committee formed within the WBF in 1998 to study possible implications on live bridge concluded that Internet could not match human sociality. The Committee foresaw no adverse effect on live play; on the contrary, they thought that online play will ensue mainly when there is no other possibility. In this case, Internet could prove – not negative, but – very positive for bridge. Nearly 15 years since then, these conclusions remain valid.

Why is this so? The main reason is that electronic means is no substitute for personal contact. We may attend an opera performance on DVD or watch a football match on TV, but we still much prefer to be present where the action is. An additional consideration at bridge is that although Internet is a means of communication, the rights of communication are restricted by the Laws of bridge. Thus overwhelming security issues exist in online play.

- **Internet Games**

It may be unexpected, but some of the most popular computer applications are ...games! One may say that electronic gaming grew up hand-in-hand with computer hardware and software. Originally, the development of electronic technology led to the introduction of 'video' games, i.e. games with image and graphics, usually projected on a TV set. The



clumsy artificial graphics and primitive sound of these early games soon gave way to much more sophisticated and realistic creations, while computing power allowed the scenarios of the games to deepen. Internet brought about a further improvement to computer games, which could now be played against real opponents through the network (online games), instead of exclusively against the computer. The market for such games is huge, as some of the top ones may cost even more than \$100 million to develop!

Once upon a time, the only universal inexhaustible games were chess and bridge. An inexhaustible game is so complicated that no player can claim to be able to grasp it in a life time; thus one does not lose interest in this game due to lack of further challenge. This is an advantage that is no longer confined to chess and bridge. What were once innocent little computer games for children have now developed into threatening online games, which are as inexhaustible as chess and bridge.

We have seen that chess has an important disadvantage compared to bridge, in that it is an exact mathematical game where everything happens under the conditions imposed by the mathematical (logic) model. Bridge is based on probability and statistics, but players may deviate from the mathematical suggestion if they feel they have a good reason to do so. In other words, bridge is closer to reality - and human nature.

Online games may go one or more steps further in this direction, and thus supplant bridge. For instance, bridge is a *turn-based* game, in the sense that each player has to wait for his turn to act and he can do nothing until the previous player has finished his own turn. In some of the most modern computer games, you do not have this restriction; they are *real-time* games. Like in real life, you can make your plan and act at the moment you judge best for your interests without waiting for anybody's turn.

Of particular interest are the *Multiplayer Online Games* (MOG) which address groups of people, rather than individuals, thus adding an element of sociality to an otherwise unsocial gaming atmosphere. Today, MOGs have advanced to *Massively Multiplayer Online Games* (MMOG) which involve thousands of players simultaneously, enabling them to cooperate and compete with each other on a large scale, and sometimes to interact meaningfully with people around the world. MMOGs take place in a persistent world where time runs and things change even when a player is not playing<sup>22</sup>!

Following market demand and technological development, Internet games improve and will continue to improve in the future. Accordingly, they constitute a 'clear and present' danger for bridge today, competing with bridge as inexhaustible games, and overtaking it in realism and, therefore, generation of interest.

We should also keep in mind that although a 70-year old is unlikely to be a computer-game fan today because he did not grow during the electronic revolution era, this will change soon for obvious reasons. Thus one more present advantage of bridge and disadvantage of computer games will disappear.

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<sup>22</sup> The *World of Warcraft*, probably the most successful of MMOGs, has now over 10 million subscribers worldwide (down from 12 million in 2010), each paying a monthly subscription starting from €13.

- **General Issues**

Computers and Internet opened up communication possibilities which were simply non-existent until 15 years ago. In the past, people had to spend time in libraries or get books and papers in order to find information on a certain subject, now they can do so at the click of a button without moving from their desk. Meeting somebody and maintaining some sort of a social relationship with a person far away both in geography and culture is as easy as never before – because the technology allows it and because it costs almost nothing!

These exciting possibilities attract people to the computer where they spend a long time every day. On the other hand, science has not advanced that much as to prolong the duration of the day; accordingly, time has become scarcer than ever before. Bridge, is of course, one of the victims of the lack of time in modern society. All other non-primary activities of the past suffer the same way.

## 8. THE FUTURE

Let us summarize what we have seen so far:

- Like chess, bridge is a game which has survived the test of time and remains on the list of preference of people almost all over the world.
- Both chess and bridge owe their continuing popularity to the fact that they are inexhaustible games of skill. However, chess is a purely mathematical game, while bridge has many human elements too. This makes chess – but not bridge – suitable for computers. Instead, bridge – but not chess – is a social game.
- The present form of the game – contract bridge – developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, first in the United States, and then in Europe. Australia followed suit, but South America and Africa remain seriously under-developed.
- Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the golden era of European development, bridge becomes a sport, recognized by the Olympic movement, but stops short of becoming an Olympic medal sport.
- In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, bridge membership ages and slightly decreases in the west. The situation is much different in Asia where – like in the economy – there is spectacular development, spearheaded by China and Indonesia. There is still a tremendous potential to be explored in many populous Asian countries.
- Bridge uses and has benefitted in many ways from the developing information technology, but it is threatened by Internet games which become all the more sophisticated and popular. It also suffers because people have now less free time available, due to the exciting information and communication possibilities offered by Internet.

As (contract) bridge is nearing its centenary, we need to evaluate the situation and reach our conclusions as to what needs to be done to safeguard the future of bridge – and by whom.

- **Is bridge here to stay?**

We have all noticed the accelerated speed with which things move in today's world. Just a few decades ago, there was quite sometime between hearing about the idea of a technical innovation and seeing it entering our lives. Not so anymore! Now, we read about research for a certain technical development and soon it is already available...

Naturally, things do not come only – but go too. How many fashionable things have now disappeared and how many devices have become obsolete! Barring museums, who is interested in a typewriter today? Yet, from their invention in 1868 through much of the 20th century, typewriters were indispensable tools for recording the written word; they disappeared once personal computers developed and word processing software was introduced in the 1980s.

What about bridge? Starting with whist, bridge has been popular in one form or another for some 250 years already. That's impressive! But is it too long? Or too short? Is there actually a limit? Probably not, if one considers that chess has been around for 15 centuries, draughts seems to date back to ancient Egypt and 'go' originated in China 2000 years ago! However, this is no guarantee that bridge has not completed its historical circle, or that it could not be heading to extinction.



As we are not aware what will happen to bridge in the future, we should study what we know. Surely, bridge today is not what it used to be in Culbertson's pre-war times or Eisenhower's post-war era. Notwithstanding the impressive technical, administrative and organizational progress of the end of the 20th century, the non-increasing membership in Europe and North America is an issue; the rapidly rising average membership age is clearly a perturbing problem.

Since ancient Greece, the money and the power have always been in Europe and, very recently, in North America. This is now changing. And it seems that also at bridge we should be getting ready to pass the baton to other areas of the world – namely, Asia – which are now on the rise and show great potential. This may hurt a little, but we have invented democracy and human rights so we should be able to accept a non-top position in bridge leadership without much of a problem. Our objective is to safeguard the future of bridge, not just the future of bridge in the west.

However, we may not be willing to surrender too easily. Then, we have to work. Work hard and with a good plan. In many bridge organizations - regional, national and international – there is a strong tendency to work on everyday problems but tomorrow's problems are often neglected as it seems that 'there is time'. Maybe so, but it depends on the plan – which presupposes that we have a plan!

- **Proper organization**

Once the plan has been drawn, approved and financed, the next step is to assign its implementation to capable people.

Proper leadership is always a crucial issue. Bridge cannot afford a care-taking leadership; it needs a leadership with a vision for the future, a dream not just to keep our sport on the map but to take it to new heights.

Then there is the old question: professionals or volunteers? Bridge is no longer an innocent pastime. It has become too complicated and demanding to be handled by people armed just with good will. When expertise and guarantees are required, it might be too ineffective and thus more expensive to rely on volunteers. Actually, the corporate world had to solve these problems much more urgently than us; all we need to do is to follow what they have discovered and tested: volunteers to dictate the policy and professionals to realize it.

Finally, notwithstanding the difficulties, we should avoid the misery of trying to make an omelet without eggs. Proper financing is essential and cannot be avoided!

What kind of development plan do we need?

- **More players**

First of all, we need new bridge players. One may watch and enjoy football even if he knows very little about it and never plays the game. Not so in bridge, where one cannot be a fan without being a player. Unfortunately, unlike chess, bridge is not easy to learn. This problem was spotted and suitable educational methods have been developed, tested and tried, which make learning bridge as easy as possible.

Who will apply these methods? Some experts may think that their performance in the game makes them automatically the best-suited to teach others. This is a big mistake! The more one knows about a certain subject, the more distant he is from the beginner. Bridge education requires bridge teachers, not bridge champions. So we need to produce bridge teachers, i.e. to educate them how to teach effectively. Again, this subject has been tackled and there is already substantial material and know-how about it.



It is better not to teach bridge to somebody if he is likely to give up and abandon the effort because he finds the game incomprehensible through no fault of his own. Not only the effort would be in vain, but bridge would be discredited in his social circles. So the effort must be done properly.

- **More young players**

We have noticed that a very serious problem is the aging of our players. We cannot stop the clock for any human, but we can do so for bridge if we introduce it to young people whose presence lowers average age. Again, this is not a new idea, and quite a bit of work has been done in this field already. But it is not enough and needs to continue.

Approaching the youth is more demanding than any other age group. By nature, young people are restless, picky, edgy and impatient. Then, they have so many options to choose from, that they would hardly give any of them a second chance. We have to be careful. Above all, we need to realize that we are proposing to Juniors to join the world of bridge, a world that belongs to all its citizens – not our world to which they have to adjust! Juniors have enough studies to need an additional one, and see bridge as a hobby where they can have competition and fun. We must make sure that we can meet these requirements.

Promoting youth bridge is an investment into the future, which will pay back eventually. As with every investment, funds must be made available at the beginning. The right people to carry out a youth programme are, of course, essential. Today in most areas, youth bridge is more recognized than effectively served. We need to change that before it is too late. In the United States, bridge is already considered by many young people as grandma's game. This is certainly not the kind of image we need if we wish to popularize bridge among the youth.

- **Innovating bridge**

Is it possible to make bridge a more attractive sport? It is not an easy question to answer, but it is worth thinking about it. A game of chess could last forever, even spanning over several days, until the advent of computers forced this form out; time-restricted games are now the rule. At bridge, young people who are much more impatient than grown-ups, find interesting to play a kind of bridge where time is very limited.

For many decades, bridge was played with just one set of boards because it was cumbersome to duplicate thousands of boards by hand. Accordingly, tournament results were not known before the end of the session. Today, we have duplicating machines and computer scoring which allow us to have scores board by board. Technology is on our side.

In all sports, competitors are fully aware of their situation relative to other contestants at any moment, and they adjust their strategy accordingly. In bridge, barometer tournaments allow competing *pairs* to know their scores almost as soon as they have completed a round – but such tournaments are still far from being universally accepted. What about barometer *team* tournaments?

Which way should we go? Do we need to simplify bridge? Or make it more complex, as it was, for example, when trick value depended on the contract level? Alternatively, maybe we should do nothing, because we are convinced that what Harold S. Vanderbilt wrote on a piece of paper that lazy afternoon of November 1925 was so perfect that nothing can improve it even a century later!

- **The trump card**

Above all, we need to realize which is actually the greatest advantage of bridge and try to capitalize on it. Bridge is a sport, and as such it offers competition. But all sports offer competition. Bridge is a mind sport that complements physical sports. But so is chess, draughts, go, etc. However, bridge has an element which is rare in other sports, and

unique in mind sports. This is **sociality**. Not only we need a partner to play bridge, but we also 'need' other people to discuss, consult, debate, and criticize about bridge. What would be bridge for millions of players without these social possibilities? Whoever has played the game knows the answer<sup>23</sup>!

Once upon a time, people met to chat and communicate. Then came the telephone, and the chat could be done from a distance. The television was a further element of the chain. And now we have Internet which supersedes technologically the devices of the past. However, notwithstanding all these incredible advances, sociality remains a major issue in the 21st century. Various social networks have developed on Internet, offering one the possibility to have thousands of 'friends' all over the world. We can chat with them live, looking at them on the screen and listening to their voice. But, although not alone, we continue to be lonely. The lack of sociality has been described as a major contemporary disease. Bridge is certainly an effective medicine, and it is recognized as such by the millions of its followers.

Sociality should be, therefore, our trump card in the development of bridge in the 21st century.



If you have any comments, you may wish to email the author at [panos@eurobridge.org](mailto:panos@eurobridge.org)

<sup>23</sup> Maybe nothing depicts better the importance of socializing over a bridge hand than George S. Kaufman's fiction *The Great Kibitzers' Strike of 1926*, published in *The New Yorker* magazine on 12 November 1949. The story goes that a kibitzer was misled and thus insulted when a player he was watching concealed a card from him! This violated his rights and led to a nation-wide strike of the kibitzers... Without anyone to watch, comment and argue, the game became dull and bridge players felt totally bored! It took many months of negotiations with the kibitzers' union to settle the matter, and this happened only after the charter of kibitzers' rights had been drawn and players accepted to observe it!

**George S. Kaufman** (1889-1961) was an American playwright, theatre director and producer, humorist and drama critic. Among the numerous comedies, political satire and musicals he wrote, *You Can't Take It With You* (1937) earned him the Pulitzer Prize, while his direction of *Guys and Dolls* won him the Tony Award (1951).